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Introduction: **MY Legacy in Brief, Defining Moments**

It all started on August 18, 1940, in Memphis, Tennessee, eighty-one years ago. My life’s journey has had many peaks and valleys trying to find my way. Before look back, I must pause and give thanks to God for His continuous grace, mercy and favor. I am blessed to have lived amid a world crisis called a “Pandemic, Covid 19,” and to see the year 2022 in real time. Moving forward, this also means that I have lived eight decades to witness many deaths and living legacies in our rich heritage. To give a quick glimpse from a historical perspective, I was born after the great depression, lived through a recession and a booming economy. On the national scene our country was going through, World War II, Korean War, Viet Nam, and the Pershing Gulf War. My elementary and secondary education evolved around an industrial society, moving through the postindustrial age to social and affective domain, to technology, and now the information stage of social media. Through it all, education was my catalyst for change and my key to success with the help of many, many others. My family, my faith and my friends traveled my journey with me along with other pioneers who blazed the trail before me. I submit that it was not an easy task with so many distractions and challenges. In the midst of it all, I believed! I believed that I could achieve anything as long as I was willing to work hard and discipline myself to achieve the goals I set for myself.

My faith, family and friends were valuable contributors whom I had to rely on to helped me overcome many devasting defining moments/events in my life that could have crushed or destroyed my life. Rather than succumb to the trials and tribulations I encountered, some how I had this crazy faith that gave me strength to endure and believe that I could become somebody. With that in mind, I am going to reflect and regurgitate how God in his infinite wisdom place the right people in my life at the right time when I was the most vulnerable, confused and ready to give up living in Memphis.

**successful Black woman. receiving over the course of my career many outstanding awards for my growth, development and using my time and talent given to me by the providence of God.**

**OMIT FOR NOW**

When I think about Memphis, many people have grownup in the South and perhaps there is very little that is unique in southern states where Jim Crow laws prevailed along with segregated schools. However, growing up in Memphis, Tennessee in the 40’s and 50’s, my birthplace, gave me the opportunity to experience segregation even though I did not understand it at an early age.

I attended segregated schools, I sat on the back of the bus and I was supposed to drink from the colored fountain labeled in public places, but I did not. My focus was not on segregation, my focus was on survival! How do I survive living in chaos and confusion?

I am the 5th of seven siblings and I had to find my way. My older siblings were too busy to ‘SEE ME” and my two younger brothers lived with our godmother so I spent a lot of time playing outside with my friends and sometimes along, dreaming of what life would be like “if”. As a youngster, I had to many “ifs” to try to name them now. I found Joy in going to church and going to school and they became my favorite past-time and safe haven to get away from home. Even though I enjoyed going to church and school which was absolutely necessary for me to find my way, I saw little that piqued my interest as a youngster that offered me hope.

Our living conditions were not the best but it was not the worse either. We lived in the Projects, LeMoyne Garden, housing for working-class people that consisted of good and bad neighbors. Moreover, the neighbors were what I call my village where people looked out for each other. As a teenager, I was faced with many challenges with my siblings and what I call life. My faithful Mother, Ethel H. Brown was my hope. Her love and perseverance overshowed the poverty or problems we faced, and she comforted me by saying, “everything is going to be alright baby”. Mama taught me to have faith and never give up.

In 1955, I was fifteen years old and there were two major events that shattered all my dreams because I thought my life was falling apart with so much happening. I was in Yazoo City visiting my aunt for the summer when Emmitt Till was killed and later that year my Mama had brain surgery. Devasted by both events, I prayed and prayed for my mama to live because she was my light and hope for me to live. Mama’s survival was the first test of my real faith in God. God answered my prayers which increased my faith to believe mama’s words, “everything will be aright”.

In 1958, after a long recovery, Mom was left partially paralyzed on her left side. I graduated from Booker T. High School with honors and attended LeMoyne College for one year. One day, in 1959, when Mom and I were having our usual talk, I told her I was not happy, and I wanted to move away. She understood and gave me permission to leave without the consent of my father. I packed my one suitcase with $19.00 in my pocket and got a ride to Chicago with a family friend. After settling in Chicago in 1960, I developed a fear of failure. I was the first sibling to leave home. However, I remembered my Mom’s departing words for me, “ baby remember if you can’t make it in Chicago, you can always come home, but know, “everything is going to be alright”.

Encouraged by my Mother, I had to discovered who I was in Chicago. I was confronted with an identity crisis. I was known as “Jackie Brown” in Memphis yet on my birth certificate stated I was Louise Elizabeth Brown. My mind was racing, What was I going to do? This was my first step toward independence. There was no one to blame, no excuses. I had to figure it out and I did. Becoming Louise changed my actions and my thinking. I thank God, my move to Chicago became a big challenge and a great blessing for a new beginning. Had I not taken the first step, God would not have made provision for the next chapters or series of events that were to come, my marriage, my career path and overcoming my greatest loss that shattered my world. This story is my legacy, filled with many peaks and valleys, along with the harsh realities of life that taught me the need to change my pace, change my place and change my perspective on life to become a successful Black woman.

**End introduction**

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**I contacted my high school prom date /boyfriend, John Coleman, who lived in Chicago who had made his grand entrance back to Memphis, July 1959. He looked like a million dollar man and we spent a lot of time together. In his quest to see me again, he came by the apartment where I was living, learned of my condition and found me a kitchenette room to live in until I found a job. When I saw that kitchenette, I decided that failure was not an option. I got a job, I put the past behind me knowing that I had to endure the harsh realities of life. After I cried and cried, I realized I had to persevere. A few months later, I**

***OMIT for Now*….got pregnant, married John Coleman and we had two children. Encouraged by my husband John Coleman, I went back to College and obtained my BS, two Master degrees and my Doctorate. Then lighting struck again. In 1990, I was devastated when I learned that my husband had six months to live. At the same time, I was at the height of my career and was offered a job as the first Black Supt of Joliet. On his deathbed, he gave** me permission to accept the job. Shortly **afterward, he made his transition.{{ Leaning on God, learning to accept the peak and valleys in my life, I am truly grateful for the opportunity that I had, to be there to hold his hand and give him joy as he transitioned to his heavenly home. Admittedly it was very difficult to see him suffer. In the end I was able to sustained the pain and found comfort in knowing that my husband would be proud to know that my successful career continued and I had to find a new beginning with the strength, courage, determination he and God had poured into my life to become a successful black woman. }} Use later**

**Chapter 1. (Landscape of) Memphis, TN. in 40’s and 50’s; My Birthplace**

Memphis, Tennessee was known as, “ Memphis City Beautiful. The Memphis city beautiful Commission was officially established by a city ordiance on July 1, 1930, making it the first and oldest beautification commission in the nation. Its mission was to transform and keep Memphis a beautiful and safe place in which to live. (memphiscitybeautiful.org.) On occasions, we participated in the cleanup, paint up day parade that was held to emphasize its mission. Edward Hull Crump, known as E. H. Crump and “Boss”, was the Mayor of Memphis from 1920 to 1940 and was the dominant political force in Tennessee until 1954 and he can be given credit for making provision for Colored people to vote without taking a written test or paying poll taxes to vote, which was a common practice of other southern states. Interestingly enough, Mr. Crump also made an unwritten agreement with Professor Blair T. Hunt, my Colored Principal of Booker T. Washing High School, that was the largest colored high school in Memphis, that his students would used the same textbooks as the largest white school, Central High school for separate but equal education. My alma mater, Booker T. Washington High School reputations was outstanding, and I received an excellent education which allowed me to excel when attending universities in Illinois. To our advantage, most of our teachers were well educated who received their advanced degrees from New York State, University of Illinois, and other universities located in the north. Memphis State and the University of Tennessee were segregated universities and colored people were not accepted there in the 40’s and 50’s. To overcome this dilemma, the state of Tennessee subsidized tuitions for teachers to attend universities in other states that were integrated and most teacher took advantage of this opportunity. I must admit that my educational experiences in Memphis City Schools prepared me to complete my educational journey with much success.

My thoughts of Memphis, with all its beauty and cleanliness, there were many positive and many negative things were happening in society in the south. Brown v. Board of Education rule the land; segregated schools, sat on the back of the bus and the colored water fountains. As mentioned earlier, Jim Crow laws prevailed, and most Colored people knew their place in society. We enjoyed our neighborhood and ignored the injustice that permeated the south. Memphis was a great place for my parents who migrated from Mississippi for a better life. They enjoyed the floor model radio that was the entertainment of the day and a way to get the news. Mama and Daddy enjoyed listening to the fireside chat of President Roosevelt who brought hope to the people with the New Deal and spoke encouraging words for Colored people to cope with post World War II depression that existed. Food was scarce, limited supplies, especially sugar, rice and flour. Some how my parents managed.

**STOP READING…………REVIEW AND LET ME KNOW IF I AM USIND A MORE NARRATIVE FORM OF WRITING……..I WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE CORRECTIONS AS WE MOVE ALONG.**

On a positive note, there are notable historical sites now that were very intriguing as a child and off limits. As an adult I witness one of the most life changing events that occurred in Memphis, TN; the death of Martin Luther King. When MLK was killed, I had flashbacks that caused me to imagine what it was like as a young adult walking downtown Memphis and passing by the Lorraine Motel where MLK was assassinated. The Lorraine Motel was known as a whore house and we were warned to crossed the street when we came near the motel. My friends and I would make up stories about the Motel and the activities we thought were going on inside as we continued our leisurely walk downtown. More importantly, MLK was killed and died in St. Joseph Hospital in Memphis in 1968. Even though I was living in Chicago, the world appeared to be in shock, amazed and disappointed. People from every ethnic group and background, mourned MLK’s death. The mission that existed to keep Memphis beautiful and a safe place to live, failed to protect the most powerful Black man that lived. As MLK once said, “ Injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere”. Memphis will forever be known in history as the place where MKL was killed. To honor MKL and his efforts/fight for civil rights, the Lorraine Motel is now a historical site and many years later the National Civil Rights Museum was built around the location of the Lorraine Motel. The Museum is a complex of museums and historic buildings that trace the history of the civil rights movement in the United States from 17th century to the present. Many of my classmates spear-headed this noteworthy project.

As I walk down memory lane, tracing my steps I am reminded of what it was like as I walked down Beale Street, know as the home of the blues, where famous musician like BB King performed. The music was loud but my friends and I enjoyed the music walking outside the cafe as BB King sang, “ The Thrill is Gone” playing his guitar named Lucille. It was fun to walk slowly down Beale Street listening to BB King, Bobbie Blue Bland and other entertainers. Beale street was a place where my friends and I could see a lot of actions take place and see family members and other grown-ups engaged in unscrupulous activities that were taboo because we should not have been attentive to grown folk business as we were often told. James Baldwin wrote a book in the 50’s “If Beale Street Could Talk”, a novel about the Love between a man and a woman, their love of family, and the struggle and conquest of love in a world flooded with hate, that appeared 5 months on the New York Times Bestseller List. His book captured some of the actions that occurred on Beale Street. For many years as I visited my family in Memphis. Beale Street is still a great attraction for tourist, even though the flavor or aura of Beale Street has changed overtime. The information I have given serves as a backdrop of my birthplace.

My siblings and I had the opportunity to continue to hear the blues when mama and daddy were not home. Saturday was cleanup day for us and we listened to WDIA, a colored radio station that featured the blues singers, Rufus Thomas, Carla Thomas, the Teen Town singings, talent shows and more. Memphis is also known as the “Home of the Blues” where many famous singers and musicians were given the opportunity to showcase their talents, some of whom were classmates.

W.C. Handy Theater was the father of the blues that allowed talented Colored people from other southern states to come and perform. The theater closed and Stax records was created perhaps to continue the legacy of W.C. Handy. With Stax being within walking distance, it was one of the places my sister and I often past when going to our favorite homemade ice cream store.

Years later, Stax Records was reconstructed and expanded in the same location as The Museum of American Soul Music, that operates a School of music and a School of the Arts. It is a replica of the former Stax Records I knew growing up, producing singers and musician, such as, William Bell, Isaic Hayes, Sam and Dave, Dave Porter, Otis Reddings, Bar-Kays and many other artists. In 2022 Stax Museum of American Soul Music is open and doing well as Soulville USA, with amazing exhibits to relive the past as well as serve as a training ground for future artists.

Walking was the most common and dependable form of transportation for me to see downtown, Beale Street and other notable sites mentioned. It was not uncommon for strangers to offer a ride. There was a sense of community, cooperation and caring for each other but the best part of walking was walking past the Harlem House on Mississippi Blvd. smelling the hot dogs and hamburgers after school and wishing I had money to buy something. The candy store with a few blocks away and we would put our pennies together to buy lots of candy for ten cents. The best part of waking up and walking in Memphis was going outside, running to the neighborhood store for my oldest sister to cook, going out to play, walking downtown, walking to church and school.

It is impossible to talk about delicious foods and the candy stores without mentioning the fresh green vegetables, homegrown tomatoes, and beans that were commonplace in everyone home. Frozen foods did not exist. Fresh vegetables were on the table every day at dinner time. Live chickens hopping around the yard after the neck was rung off was gross, but it was the best fried chicken ever. The best treat when walking downtown was to save your lunch money to buy a pull pork BBQ sandwich with cole slaw which was finger licking good. Memphis BBQ was and still is indescribable delicious and has become world renown. Currently Memphis has many attractions for tourist beside those mentioned. Memphis has grown and expanded to included German Town, and other communities. Downtown has been expanded featuring Mud Island, the Pyramid where many sports events and community events take place.

**Chapter 2.**  **Mama’s Sustaining Love and the Village**

Imagine a delicate knitted quilt with different designs and different stiches going in opposite directions, some loose, some strong and some weak, yet the end results are a beautiful tapestry woven together forming a beautiful picture on one side. However, on the underside, there are loose ends, knots, frayed ends held together by the love and care of its owner. As I think about this quilt, I am reminded of my family, how different we all were. Some strong, some weak, some fragile yet my mama’s love held the family together to form a beautiful picture when outside the house despite of the chaos happening on the inside.

Mama was a very beautiful woman with flawless skin, a native of Yazoo City, Mississippi and to this day, I will always think of her as the most kindest, loving person that ever lived.

Her family was very large with 11 siblings, and they live in what was known as the city yet rural with outdoor toilets. She married my daddy in 1932 and they migrated to Memphis during the depression for a better life.

Mama was an angel in disguised that God gave to us as a mother to cover us with her prayers and pour love into us when things were not lovable. The most fondness childhood memory of mama seems like yesterday. I remember how she embraced me with so much love when she was not distracted by my daddy and other siblings. Her love kept me grounded and my home environment became oblivious. I enjoyed Mama sitting me by her side and rubbing her hand over my hair to comfort me and her warm loving spirit covered my pain and gave me hope to face any challenge.

It was impossible to talk negative to mama because she had a standard response, “Everything is going to be alright.” Don’t worry about me, I am going to have my heaven on earth”. In other words, stop worrying about me; I am alright.” Then she would quote her favorite scripture, Isaiah 54:17, in mama’s words, “*No weapon formed against me shall prosper, And every tongue which rises against me in judgement, shall be condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from me, says the Lord.”* NKJV

Daddy also a handsome native of Yazoo City, Mississippi, was the epitome of a man raise in Mississippi on a farm with many acres of land. His family owned one of the largest farmland in Yazoo City. And as a young man, when he was not working on the farm, he was well dressed going to church and going out on weekends. Additionally, the values that his father instilled in him were the same values he imposed on his family. He believed children should listen and not ask question nor be in the room when grownups were talking. He also had double standards which were common during the 40’s and 50’s. Mama nor the girls in the family could not wear pants, sleeveless or short dresses or makeup. He was an old school thinker who believed a woman’s place was to get marriage, have children, take care of them, the house and nothing more.

Daddy’s routine was very predictable; most of the time during the week, daddy was quiet, unassuming and a man of few words whose presence dominated the household. When Friday came he was like a chameleon, a person who changes his/her opinion or behavior according to the situation. He shifted for passive to aggressive, a completely different person. Alcohol consumption began of Friday and ended on Sunday. He was a weekend alcoholic, loud and ready to raise hell for no specific reason. As I grew older, I began to challenge my daddy’s belief system to mama and my words fell on deaf ears. Mama did not want me to question her about daddy. All the other siblings seemed not to care, never voiced an opinion or did not care. Apparently, I may have been the only sibling struggling with our family situation. Time had brought about a change. Women started working outside the home and I began to imagined a different world. With my crazy thoughts my siblings did not engage in a conversation with me about how the world was changing and how women were important as men. They would look at me with a jaundice eye and keep on going on their merry way, good, bad or indifferent.

Initially, I thought my mama was so accepting of my daddy’s until I grew up and had a family. I came to understand mama’s love and why she was protecting the family structure. The thought never occurred to me that mama had no intentions of separating from my daddy or breaking up her family. Daddy was not perfect, and mama knew that too. Daddy and I did not always see eye to eye but he was the provider for us. We were never homeless, we always had food to eat and clothes to wear. To that end, to live in my daddy’s house I had to learn how to put my case to rest against my daddy and forget why.

As life moved on, rather than talk to mama, I talked to God, asking Him to help me find my way, and being the 5th child of seven sibling was not easy. My oldest sister was in charge of us when mama and daddy were at work or away from home, and she had a tendency to do things her way. She welcomed the opportunity to send us outside to play to get out of her way.

Playing outside whenever possible was my favorite past-time for me to find my space, my voice and kept me away from the chores and chaos inside our household. On any given day in LeMoyne Garden, when playing outside with our neighborhood friends, my two older brothers, were allowed to roam the neighborhood, while my sister, and I had to stay close to home even though she had no interest in playing with me because we had different opinions on the types of games to play. My sister whom I loved dearly was competitive, played ruff and did not mind fighting. I, on the other hand, enjoyed the easy fun games that were less competitive, and I had no interest in fighting. My two younger brothers, most often were inside or at our godmother’s house. My oldest sister was the best cook ever and as the youngest girl I was ignored most of the time, lonely and isolated because evidently to them, I served no useful purpose. My brothers and sisters did not “see me”. Generally, I had a different focus on life and I wanted more material things and more attention from the family. In the meantime, I had to find my place and my space somewhere. The front porch was a great place to spent time alone, dreaming and drifting off into space. When I was involved, I generally became the scape goat or victim of some of their dangerous games. My first gruesome incident occurred when I was 8 or 10 years old. I became the unthinkable casualty and a nightmare for my siblings. One morning after breakfast, my oldest sister, decided to organize a pretend clinic in the house after mama and daddy left for work. My brother, the third and smartest sibling was the doctor, my sister was the nurse. The rest of us were the patients. The clinic was supposedly open so that we could all get our vaccination, even though we were all were up-to-date on our required vaccines. I was encouraged to go first if I wanted to be a part of the clinic. The living room was the waiting room and the kitchen was the doctor’s office. My name was called “Jackie Brown” come forward, it is time for you to see the doctor according to the nurse. I proceeded to the kitchen and a chair was waiting for me to sit. As I sat in the chair, I saw the fire burner turned on and my brother was standing next to the stove with a butter knife in his hand. He told me “don’t worry it will not take but a few minutes and we will be done”. My sister, held my right arm out. I closed my eyes, and my brother laid a hot butter knife to my arm. I bellowed out a loud scream as I watched the skin roll off my arm. Panic set in, I sat there with tears flowing down my face, in pain and my siblings were scurrying around to find something to cover my arm before mama came home. Needless to say, everyone was quiet when mama came home and I had fallen asleep. When mama saw my arm, she was to upset to fuss about it, she just rushed me to John Gaston Hospital where it was determined that I had received third degree burns. In the meantime, daddy was never told of how the incident really happened because we may have all gotten a whooping. In time, my arm healed, as of today, I still have the scar on my arm. After that incident, I wasn’t asked to play with them again because in their eyes, I was too weak. To relieve me of agony of being the target for my siblings, Mama, decided to take me to work with her and I learned to clean the white family ‘s home. Riding the bus with mama to work was a defining moment that gave me time alone with her without any interruptions. To my surprise, one day while at worked with mama, she was told, when I grow up I could become the maid. Anxious to leave that day, I could not wait to tell my mama, please, do not tell your boss I want to work for her because when I grow up, I am going to have my own maid to clean my house. Mama smiled and gave me her favorite expression of love, wrapping her arms around me, saying, “baby, everything is going to be alright”. The thought of becoming a maid was difficult to conceive and somewhat devastating to be looked at as a maid when I grow up. My goal was to make sure I did every possible to find a way how to not to make this become a reality.

Another intriguing incident happened, I was outside finding my space and my voice with my friends and having fun, I was called to come inside before the streetlight came on. Befuddled and a little puzzle, when I came inside, I was told that I was going to get a whooping. I had no idea as to why, As the older siblings were getting their whooping with an ironing cord, running and hiding from daddy, I questioned my mama, “why am I getting a whooping”, I have not done anything wrong. I soon realized rule #1. Everyone gets a whooping when one sibling did something wrong. As fate would have it, daddy was so tired when it was time for me to get a whooping, I only got a few hits. Determined to asked questions, when my other sisters and brother did not, was unheard of in our household as a youngster.

There were three unwritten rules to follow.

1.Be home before dark or before the street lights came on.

2. Everyone got a whopping when one sibling did something wrong.

3. Dinner is served when Dad comes home.

Our family structure was complicated living in a three-bedroom apartment. All the girls slept together in the same bed and the boys slept in the same bed. It was not unusual for some of us to sleep on the floor. The two younger boys live with my godmother. It was amazing to think how much mama loved us, managed seven children and worked. Living in chaos and confusion was the norm. I became the family snitch because I would speak up and tell what little I heard from my siblings. I also did some of the housework so my sister and i would not get in trouble. To keep peace, I would retreat to my favorite spot, sitting on the porch, dreaming and dreading my environment, and thinking about the future, wondering what I wanted to do and who I wanted to become. Little did I know at that time that I was a dreamer who often drifted off into my dream world to escape the confused world in which I lived and the harsh realities of life. I began to realize the limitations and the advantages of living in a household with a large family. Most of my basic needs were met and I began to examine myself to find a way to live with my siblings whom I loved yet I did not feel well connected to anyone but my sister who was one year and five months older than I

and my youngest brother. We spent a lot of quality time together as we grew older.

The neighbors played a great part in taking us to church, giving my Mama a helping hand and spying on us. Peeping out of windows and watching us outside was a common occurrence. Before mama could reach the house, she was greeted by the naysayers, telling her what we had done that day. Mama was cool, she thanked them and kept walking. Another common occurrence was to borrow a cup of sugar, a stick of butter, a cup of flour or an egg from your neighbor. It was like the barter system; you give me this and I will you something else back. Hardly ever do I remember taking an egg back to a neighbor or any of the other items borrowed. That was the way of life in the project, it was our village, everyone looked out for each other, good, bad, or indifferent. The good news is we could earn a nickel of dime for running to the neighborhood grocery store for the old people. In those day, a nickel could by a big bag of candy or popsicle. The village was important because there was little room to judge people. Everyone was literally in the same economic situation and the same living conditions. Fourteen years, we lived together, cried together and we all went to school together. On Sunday, our quiet day was church day. Most of the village people went to church including us.

Seldom did we have to worry about daddy on Sunday. It was his day of rest after his Friday and Saturday weekend getaway from home, drinking with his friends.

Daddy gave us his approval for us to go to church every Sunday and during the weekdays even though he would never attend when I was living in Memphis. In retrospect, I suspect my daddy was lenient because his oldest brother, Rev. Brown was the Pastor of the church, Christ Temple Church of Christ Holiness located on Williams and Lauderdale. Uncle Bud (Rev. Brown) loved his brother and he was supportive of us and showered us with love and candy.

Mama would go with us sometimes, nonetheless, we all had to go to church if we wanted to go to a movie on Saturday, or go to some other function. As a way out of the house, when I was 11 years old, my sister, Jean and I joined church, sang in the choir, went to Sunday School every Sunday and on weekdays, when necessary, which gave us access to more freedom. I loved going to church, singing in the choir and attending Sunday School. It was a relief to hear a good sermon, good singing and learning about the word of God that gave me hope. Amazingly, as I recall all seven siblings joined church and attended regularly until they moved away from daddy’s house. Some of the church members would pick us up for church and many days we walked having fun along the way. Clothes and other gifts were often given to our family by some of the good church members. Our godmother, who attended our church was the family’s special gift from God who dedicated her life to caring for my two younger siblings and she did not hesitate to give her unconditional love and support to the entire family. Apparently, she volunteered her service with very little income, to provide a vehicle or pathway for my family to succeed, buying clothes, shoes, food and permanently keeping my two younger siblings. She was our spiritual god-fearing earthly angel who love and showered us with gifts. God’s grace and favor. I am reminded of this song when I think of her, “Precious memories how they linger, how they every flood my soul, in the stillness of the midnight, Precious, sacred scenes unfold.

The church mirrored my father’s belief system; it was how he was reared. He would often say, I am not going to church because he did not want to be a hypocrite. He contended that some of the same people sitting in church on Sunday were out drinking with him on Saturday. Actually, this was a statement that I did not understand, nor did I want to understand. Moving forward, one sunny day, I received a called in Chicago from mama, telling me that daddy had quit drinking and joined church. Shocked by mama words, I felt numb. In my wildest dream I never thought I would hear these words from mama. Flashbacks of daddy’s behavior came to mine. Nontheless, I had some doubt: I did not know if I should laugh or cry, but I believed mama. In 1965, my daddy surrendered his life to Jesus, after we were all grown, joined church and repented. Another answered prayer; mama often said she would live to see daddy saved, have her heaven on earth and she did. Seeing in believing, I was convinced that daddy had changed his life when I went home to visit. Daddy, a godly man greeted me with open arms. It took much prayer for me to find a way to tell him how I regretted his behavior when I was growing up. My Dad asked for forgiveness, prayed with me and in time I did.

Mama and daddy became faithful members of Christ Temple, and he treated mama like a queen, even though she had gone thru many storms and health challenges that left her partially paralyzed. Her dream and prayer had become a reality and they both served God until He called them home to glory, in1985, and 1986.

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**Chapter 3.** **External and internal conflict were at the core of my existence**.

Elementary and High Education, was a place of enjoyment and embarrassment. In the South most teachers were committed to educating students. They realized the challenges black students encountered in a segregated world. Pride and dignity were mandatory. The Principal fought for us to have equal education. School became my safe haven, on the honor roll, played in the Junior High Band. Sometimes I got in trouble because I finished my work sooner than the other students. I graduated with honors and a member of the National Honor Society. Selected to participate in school plays. One year of college, with little or no hope to continue. Overall, I probably would have been involved in more school activities, but I had no family support, financially or emotionally. I was shame of the clothes I had to wear to school, my nappy hair and shoes. I acted silly in school to compensate for my physical appearance and internal conflict regarding my well-being. Many positive events occurred at church and school which I enjoyed, yet I saw little that piqued my intertest along with little hope. Immaturity, lack of any other organized activities other than the church had little influence to help be overcome the struggles I faced. I finally learned how to make money baby-sitting, bought my clothes on a lay-a-way plan. Yet I rise!

**Chapter 4. In a state of uncertainity:** Planning my Great Escape

Struggling with poverty. Tired of the strict rules of my Dad and his dominance over the family even though he spent a lot of time away from home. Mom was my heroin. My Dad was a weekend alcoholic which disturbed me greatly. It was too difficult to continue to endure. My sibling did not seem to care or rather they appeared to be happy all the time. In 1955 Mom’s had brain surgery and her perseverance gave me strength to fight and not give up. She was in a coma for seven days. After school I spent every night in the hospital with my Mom, praying and talking to her. I was 15 years old and I became in charge of our home because all the other siblings had moved away, married or were in the Armed Services. My Dad soon realized I was trying to be obedient but not the one to pacify him. I was not domesticated nor willing to accept his behavior. Cooking and caring for the household was not my forte. I had no intentions of learning. Needless to say, my oldest sister and her family moved back home to help care for Mom and Dad.

Four years after Mom’s recovery, I knew God heard every prayer I prayed. Mom understood all of her seven children and their personalities. She also understood my life was miserable. She gave me her blessings and permission to leave.

**Chapter 5**. **My Big Dream: my move to the big city, Chicago 1959-60**

Traveling to Chicago with $19.00 and 1 suitcase was a life changing event.

I am the first sibling to move away to another state. I had a few relatives and a few friends in Chicago. My only plan was to get away from home. Once I got into the car to leave Memphis, I felt relieved and anxious, knowing that I need to develop a strategic plan. In the moment that was less important. However, it was an exciting driving to Chicago. Arriving in Chicago at 1:00 am in the morning was my first eye opener, looking at the bright lights and tall building in awe. From my perspective the city was so big. In that moment reality hit me in the face. What are my next steps? How long will my money last? My imagination was on overload. How was I going to navigate in this big city or better yet where was I going to live. I prayed and asked God to please sustain me until I got a job. My Mom’s words continued to echo in my head, “Baby, everything is going to be alright”.

**Chapter 6. Who am I? Finding my self**

Where do I go from here? I stayed overnight with my friend and I knew my stay was temporary. Desperate for answers and help, I called my high school friend, and prom date, John Coleman, and told him I moved to Chicago. Somewhat shocked of my arrival, he came to see me. Realizing I was literally homeless, he found me a room in this big building where his aunt was the manager and the rooms were known as kitchenettes. I almost fainted when I saw a one-bedroom apartment with a stove and refrigerator in it. The bathroom was for everyone on that floor. It was too late to turn around. Lesson learned, be careful what you pray and ask God for. God gave me the opportunity to leave home. I was more than ready to leave, now it was time for me to accept the new challenges ahead to give some purpose to my life.

**Chapter 7. Building** **confidence; Finding my way and investing my resources**

Faith over fear became my mantra. My identify crisis became prevalent. Since birth, I have been called “Jackie Brown.” Tough questions to answer. Louise Elizabeth Brown, my birth name is a conflict. Who do I want to be was not the question? To get a job and a social security card, I had to become “Louise” putting the past behind me and developing a new look on life. Jackie had to GO! I invested $3.00 in carfare to look for a job. Three days later, I was hired at Alden’s Catalog Company making $30.00 a week. I traveled two hours to get to work using public transportation. I rode two buses and two trains, leaving home at 6:00 a.m. to get work by 8:00. I learned how to navigate around the city using public transportations, yet the crowded subways were overwhelming initially. Many times, I would fall asleep on the bus and missed my stop. However, I was constantly reminding myself that this was the life I had chosen in the big city.

**Chapter 8. Excuses removed: Learning to become an independent women**.

Finding strength to overcome my fears and hardships had become my way of life to endure all the challenges. Refusing handouts, working parttime, and spending more time with John was somewhat encouraging. I was determined to live a better life. I quickly learned that poverty has no specific location. The struggle was real. This stage or chapter in my life made me realize all the excuses I created in my mind about my family were no longer in the way, God had taken them away. I was no longer in Memphis, the place I had little hope and support. My parents had fulfilled their responsibilities by providing food, clothing and shelter. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Need was revealed and I understood, self-actualization was to be accomplished by me, or it had to become the norm. I wanted more out of life, therefore I had to do more to reach that goal. It was no longer by parents’ responsibility. I remembered the phrase “If it is to be, it’s up to me”. Hard work, determination and a new lifestyle was somewhat fearful. I missed my family and sometimes felt all alone. After a few months, John and I were reacquainted and reunited as friends. With no family nearby, we spent more time together, we became lovers. John was so kind, gave me a place to live and willing to help me find my way. The chemistry between us was so powerful, I was willing to take the risk to have sex with him one time when we both needed someone to love. Not in my wildest dream did I think about the outcome. I became pregnant and my heart was hurt because I did not want to put another burden on him nor me. I began to think, was this my idea or God’s idea to come to Chicago to be with the man who loved me. It was time for me to go see Mom.

**Chapter 9. A new** **beginning, pregnancy, marriage and a husband**.

**Living from check to check, perseverance and rejoicing through my storms**.

Due to our unseen circumstances, John nor I had planned for a baby nor have money to pay for a wedding. Before we took that leap of faith. We both did some soul searching. We decided to wait until we saved enough money to get an apartment. When I went home to see my family, Mom and Dad were excited to see me. Before I could get the courage to discuss my condition in terms or moving back home, I received a phone call from Alden’s Catalog Co. for a full-time position. I returned to Chicago! God made provision for me to help us get an apartment. When its God’s idea, He makes provision.

We had a small wedding, close family only, performed by my Uncle who lived in Chicago Heights. Going thru pre-counseling, this scripture was said, “The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish woman tears hers down”. Proverbs 14:1 (NIV). I was not capable of discussing or comprehend this until later on in our marriage.

**Chapter 10. Blessing in disguise**

With a supportive and understanding husband, our real struggle began after my second son was born. Change was inevitable. I could no longer work with two children. My parenting skill were not fully developed. Becoming a stay at home mom, was difficult. I mentioned earlier. I did not know how to cook, how to be a wife or mother. Together we weathered many storms. My husband decided I should go back to school. He worked two jobs, kept the kids during the day while I attended Chicago Teachers College. Standing together on faith, making many sacrifices, I got my first teaching job in1968. We bought our first house in 1970. I became a wise woman trying to build a foundation for my family and a professional student. My focus was on being successful with the support and sacrifices of my husband earning 2 masters degrees and a doctorate degree.

**Chapter 11. My Educational journey**

During my educational journey, Raymond School students taught me the value of teaching Black students. Every little Black girl reminded me of who I was. I earned many awards and recognition as a teacher. My career as a teacher lasted 18 years and I have many defining moments that contributed to my success. In my quest to become a superintendent, I was accepted in the Doctoral Administrative Program at the University of Illinois in Urbana as a six grade teacher. Rigorous exams and extensive paperwork were required. I met all the requirements, I thought! However, In the middle of the first semester, my Professors advised me that I would be dropped from the program if I did not become a current administrator. In other words, I was going to be dropped from the program. God miracles were amazing and on time. Ten sitting Superintendents in the program learned of my situation and offered me a job as principal. I accepted principalship in Joliet in 1986. As I climbed the ladder of success, my sons enjoyed school and playing sports with their father cheering the on and sometime coaching their teams. After graduating from high school, they too, went off to college. John worked for the US Post Office, as a Chicago Police Officer and later became an entrepreneur. Life was good.

**Chapter 12. Peaks and Valleys**

In 1989, at the height of my career, John became ill and it was the most devastating news I had encountered. That same year, I received an award as one of Illinois Distinguished Educators and asked to become the superintendent of Joliet Public Schools where I served as principal for 3 years. My proud husband attended the ceremony even thought he was weak. He also encouraged me to take the job as superintendent. My thoughts were on him getting well. I appreciated the offer but I my anxiety was building up regarding his health. John health was steadily declining. I questioned his physicians, why wasn’t my husband getting better. John’s doctor told me to ask John why. Determined to keep me motivated and focused on succeeding: and our boys ground and in good spirit, John failed to inform us that he was terminally ill and the doctors had given him 6 months to live. In the midst of John’s sufferings, he found strength to help me to understand God’s will. We prayed together daily. His fortitude and will to live was hard to conceive. My faith decreased as fear of being along increased. Our conversation centered around me accepting the job as the first Black Superintendent of Joliet District 86. My heart was torn and troubled because I wanted to be by his bedside during his last days.

When he told me and his best friends, his greatest joy and achievement was to live long enough to see us reach our goal, for me to be successful and become an independent Black woman. As he lay dying, his major concerned and last request was for me to go on with my life so he could rest in eternal peace. My soul cried out Lord why me? Why now?

**Leaning on God, and survival**

I accepted the job as superintendent in Jan,1990, in May John was place in Hospice at home. My School Board Members knew my husband was gravely ill and my insurance paid for him to have a nurse during the hours I was at work which was a blessing in disguised. Troubled by the fact that I had to leave my husband everyday was difficult yet the smile on his face when I came home gave me strength to endure the harsh realities of life. On July 21, 1990, John made his transition. My sons and I had to find our way to continue our journey. Work kept me busy during the day, at night I cried myself to sleep. I cried on my way to work and on the way home. Once I arrived at work, I pretended I was ok and I continued to do well. Sleepless nights, filled with grief became my norm. Weight loss was becoming noticeable. Overcoming the pain of losing my first love and my greatest supporter was my greatest challenge. I received therapy, nothing seemed to help until I turned to God in Prayer. One horrendous night, I heard God’s voice “Be Still”, I have never failed you.” I was frightened and scared yet it caused me to think how good God has been in our life time together. Eventually the pain eased and I began to think about how God had blessed me with a man who dearly loved me and how God brought and shaped our lives together as one. Giving God the glory for all He had done brought me out of darkness. Walking in FAITH and rejoicing for God’s grace, mercy and favor allowed me to finish my doctorate and become Dr. Louise E. Coleman. My career as the first Black Superintendent was filled with many successes, awards and recognitions. I had come this far my faith, leaning on God. God was my refuse and a very present help when I was troubled. John Coleman was the vessel/servant He used to transform my life. My amazing husband, John Coleman had completed his earthly journey. He taught me how to become a successful Black woman and to that end I say Thank you God. My mantra now is “ To God be the glory for all the things He has done in my life. In retrospect, I sometime wonder what my life’s reflections would look like if I had stayed in Memphis, Tennessee.

**My New beginning:**

After being a widow for 10 years, in 2000, I became very independent, successful with a rewarding retirement and began a new career at the university level as well as a National Educational consultant. To end this chapter of my life, I met Dr. Kenneth Freeman who captured my attention and this was the start of another series of life changing events!